

# RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

An Inventory of the Estate both Real and Personal of the  
Hon<sup>ble</sup> John J. Goucher Esq<sup>r</sup> late of Richmond Dist.  
made by us the Subscribers appointed Quarterly.

| JOSEPH BOWKER                     |       | A SILHOUETTE FROM DOCUMENTS |      |
|-----------------------------------|-------|-----------------------------|------|
| 30 Acres of improved Land @ 100/- | 2 158 | 1 Old blue coat & vest      | 1    |
| 70 Do of unimproved @ 40/-        | 4 40  | 1 Pair linen & cotton       | 6    |
| 1 Dwelling House                  | 40    | 1 Pair breeches             | 6    |
| 1 Barn                            | 28    | 1 Do Leather Do             | 18   |
| 1 Yoke of oxen                    | 15    | 2 Woolen shirts             | 14   |
| 1-3 year old Steifer              | 4 2   | 1 Old cotton shirt          | 3    |
| 1-2 year old Do                   | 3 3   | 1 Bed & Pillows             | 12   |
| 1 Black cow with white face       | 4     | 1 Pair sheets               | 15   |
| 1 Red hind back cow               | 4 10  | 1 Old coverlet              | 5    |
| 1 Brindle 3 year old heifer       | 4     | 1 Pair Pocket book          | 6    |
| 1 Calf                            | 1 10  | 1 Do do do                  | 1 19 |
| 1 Bay Mare                        | 15    | 1 36 Red                    | 10   |
| 1 Quarter of a Saw Mill           | 10    | 1 32 Do                     | 8    |
| 9 Sheep @ 7/-                     | 3 3   | 1 28 Do                     | 8    |
| 3 Swine @ 16/-                    | 2 8   | 1 23 Do                     | 8    |
| 1 Small Brass Kettle              | 5     | 1 26 Do                     | 4    |
| 1 Small Iron Do                   | 6     | 1 Pair Milliard             | 8    |
| 1 Old Lion Pot                    | 6     | 1 Hitchel                   | 9    |
| 1 Iron Spider                     | 3     | 1 Saddle                    | 18   |
| 1 Iron Tea Kettle                 | 3     | 1 Pair Tongue               | 5    |
| 1 Large plaster Bayon             | 5 8   | 1 Pair Skin                 | 4    |
| 1 Pair of Silver Shoe buckles     | 18    | 1 Pair Trammel              | 8    |
| 1 Do of Silver Do                 | 8     | 1 Broad Do                  | 4    |
| 1 Stock Do                        | 8     | 1 Narrow Do                 | 4    |
| 1 Bosom broach                    | 3 6   | 1 Iron Pick Do              | 6    |
| 1 Pair Silver Buttons             | 3     | 1 Chest with drawers        | 15   |
| 1 Pair blue coat & vest           | 4 8   | 1 Pair blue & pin           | 5    |
| 1 Do Do great coat                | 2 5   | 1 Pair                      | 3    |
|                                   |       | 1 Pair                      | 2 6  |

## Rutland Historical Society - 101 Center Street, Rutland, Vermont

The Society publishes the *Quarterly* for its members in the interests of preserving and studying the history of the Rutland Community which comprises the towns of West Rutland, Proctor, Rutland and the City of Rutland. The Society maintains and operates a museum and resources center at 101 Center Street, Rutland, in the former Bank of Rutland Building (1825), now owned by the City of Rutland.

*Joseph Bowker*

Membership in the Society is open to all upon payment of annual dues which are: Regular—\$2.00; Contributing—\$10.00; Life (one payment)—\$75.00. Gifts of money or articles of historic interest are welcome at all times and are deductible for tax purposes since the Society is a certified non-profit corporation chartered by the State of Vermont.

*Joseph Bowker*

Editor: F. P. Elwert

*Joseph Bowker assistant*

### Coming Events

House tour of historical and interesting exteriors and interiors of buildings in the Rutland area—Saturday, June 18, 1977, from ten to four. Price of admission ticket will be \$3.00 for the benefit of the Society.

Architectural exhibit at the Chaffee Art Center, 16 South Main Street, Rutland, from June 4 through July 2, 1977. The Society is co-operating in this project.

Opening day for the museum of the Society will be Saturday, June 18, 1977. Hours on opening day—from ten to five; regular hours thereafter will be from one to five daily, except Monday.

July 6 and 7 will be observed fittingly in commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the drafting of the Constitution of the State.

### The Cover

Reproduced is a portion of the inventory of the Estate of Joseph Bowker, as filed in Volume 8, pp 99-100 in the Rutland District Probate Court, with permission.

The only study of any consequence of Joseph Bowker was prepared by the Rutland historian, Henry Hall, whose address delivered to the Vermont Historical Society at Windsor 114 years ago is reprinted with deletions and notations in this issue.

"Henry Hall, (to quote M. D. Gilman's *Bibliography of Vermont*, Burlington, 1877, p 113) was a native and resident of Rutland, where he was born September 14, 1814; he was at Middlebury College two years, but was graduated at Amherst College, 1835. He taught at an academy near Baltimore, Md. about two years; he then read law and was admitted to the Rutland County Bar in 1839; was Register of Probate 1839-1861, after which time he paid more time to historical and literary study than to his profession. He published around 1863 a series of twenty-five articles or more in the Rutland *Herald*, relating to the early history of Vermont; also articles in Miss Hemenway's *Gazetteer* [one such article is the address on Joseph Bowker reprinted here, which is in Volume III, pp 1056-1059]; he delivered many lectures upon literary, religious and scientific topics; and in 1876-7 wrote a series of 40 to 50 letters from Washington for the Rutland and other newspapers. He died in 1889."

Hall lived in 1867 in a house since torn down, the site of the Lawrence house at 17 Washington Street. In his later years he lived at the end of Blueberry Lane in a house once located on the Livak farm.

*Joseph Bowker*

#### BOOK REVIEW

Rowland E. Robinson. *Vermont. A Study in Independence*. Rutland: Tuttle (1975) 370 pp with an introduction by Paul A. Eschholz. paperback. \$4.95.

This state, one of the last frontiers of the American spirit has, in its history, an even greater mystique. The fabled careers of such folk characters as Ethan Allen, Seth Warner, Calvin Coolidge, Snowflake Bentley and, yes, Robinson himself, are more than a match for the rapidly deteriorating Vermont of today.

In *Vermont*, a popular history commissioned by the Boston publishers, Houghton-Mifflin, back in 1892, Robinson has blended the two facets of Vermont life—its history and its nature—as skillfully as he did in his Danvis stories. Although Granther Hill's dialect is missing, lyrical descriptions of nature bridge the narration of factual matters in a manner that is Robinson's alone. To the Robinson buff, this reprint is most welcome; to the newcomer the book is highly recommended.

F.P.E.

*Rutland, February 21<sup>st</sup> 1780*  
*Received of James Leshorn Commissioner*  
*for sale of Confiscated Estates Two Hundred*  
*Dollars for the use of this State*  
*Joseph Bowker*

Receipt of Bowker as Commissioner of Sequestration. The original filed in Manuscript State Papers of Vermont, Vol. 8, p 190. Courtesy of the Editor of the State Papers of Vermont, Ms. Marlene Wallace.

## THE HONORABLE JOSEPH BOWKER

by Henry Hall

[Read before the Vermont Historical Society at Windsor, July 1 and 2, 1863]

If we consult our published histories for a knowledge of the leading actors in the drama of Vermont's colonial and revolutionary struggles, we shall find none whose appearance is so weird and spectre-like as that of the Hon. Joseph Bowker of Rutland . . . the John Hancock of Vermont.<sup>1</sup>

Bowker died 79 years ago [July 11, 1784]. His only surviving heirs were [his wife] and two married daughters whose descendants are said to be in the far west.<sup>2</sup> . . . his official files in the county clerk's office were probably burned half a century since [that would be about 1813], with a mass of other papers . . .<sup>3</sup> . . . Bowker was early left an orphan—brought up in the family of a Mr. Taintor, a prosperous farmer—privately betrothed to his daughter Sarah, drafted into the army during the French War, in the garrison at Ticonderoga one or two years—he returns with so good a reputation that he soon becomes the son-in-law of his quasi guardian.<sup>4</sup>

In October 1773 we find Bowker in Rutland [Records filed in the United Church of West Rutland show Bowker and others forming the first church in Rutland in October 20, 1773] with the title of Captain . . . Moderator of Proprietor's meetings one of the committee to find the center of town; chairman of the committee to inspect proprietors' titles, etc. . .

*Joseph Bowker*

<sup>1</sup>A double reference: Bowker was to the Vermont patriots, Ira Allen and Thomas Chittenden what John Hancock was to the Founding Fathers, Franklin and Jefferson; the most obvious allusion is to the prominence of Bowker's name at the head of the list of signers of the more important early Vermont documents, although not written in as large a hand as that of Hancock's.

<sup>2</sup>Both girls married men named Beebe; Sarah married Alexander, they had twelve children and Alexander is said (on the authority of genealogist Marvel Swan) to have died in Mexico, N.Y. . . . The other daughter, Rebecca, married Solomon, then moved to Brandon.

<sup>3</sup>The original court papers of Rutland County have recently been placed in order, unfolded, and filed in acid-free folders and stored in steel file cabinets in the downstairs vault at the court house. The chronological arrangement of the folders does not indicate any gaps in any period of time, especially around 1813. A careful reading of each document for indexing has not turned up any papers bearing the signature of Bowker, although other prominent figures of the period are represented. The vast bulk of the papers and their chronological integrity would indicate that the papers survived the Courthouse fire of 1868. For one reason or another, we must conclude the court records signed by Bowker, have been at one time or another, "picked over".

<sup>4</sup>Bowker obviously was married before the French war and did indeed marry Sarah Taintor, in Westborough, Mass. on the 1st of November 1749, well before Ticonderoga was built and wrested from the French. According to Marvel Swan, Bowker served in Captain Pettibone's company from 1755-57. Simon, Bowker's youngest child (who did not come to Rutland) was born in 1752; Sarah was born in 1764; Rebecca's birthdate is unknown.

He soon appears a general office holder for the town, county and state; one of the Committee of Safety; a magistrate very generally sought for the execution of conveyances, for the adjudication of legal rights, and for the trial of tories; town treasurer, selectman, town representative, member of the Governor's Council; member of the Board of War, Commissioner for Sequestration of tories' estates; judge of the Probate and County courts, and Chief Judge of a special court, appointed by the first legislature.<sup>5</sup>

About 1780 Bowker, James Claghorn, Henry Strong and John Smith built a sawmill about 80 rods (quarter of a mile) from the main north and south road (Main Street) on Handpole, Moon's or Tuttle's brook. A portion of his farm abounds in clay, and an inventory of his estate shows a note of \$13 against John Forbes for three thousand brick. . .

But the positions in which Bowker is best, or only, known to the general public, are that of president of those conventions that asserted the state's independence and framed the first constitution, and that of speaker of the house of representatives. . . Does not his invariable election as presiding officer bespeak him pre-eminently familiar with parliamentary usages, self-possessed, courteous, impartial and quick of apprehension?

Let us turn to his pursuits and tastes . . . In his deed [to James Claghorn] he modestly styles himself a yeoman, while some of his brother farmers in their

*Joseph Bowker*

<sup>5</sup>By virtue of serving on the Governor's Council, Bowker used the title of "Assistant," not to be confused with the office of Assistant Judge of County Court, an office which he also held. See cut below.

*Notary of Claims or Demands of any party  
claiming from By or under me or the Original Grantee In Witness  
thereof I have hereunto set my hand and Seal this 26<sup>th</sup> Day  
of June A 1783. Signed Sealed & Delivered & professed  
of Joseph Bowker  
Alexander Beebe Benajah Roots*

*Rutland & Rutland June 1783  
Personally appeared Benajah Roots the above named  
grantor signor and sealed and acknowledged the above  
instrument to be his free act and deed Before Me  
Joseph Bowker Assistant*

*Recd and Entered the above Deed July 1<sup>st</sup> 1784*

Bowker as witness, notary and recorder of a deed of the Rev. Benajah Roots. Rutland Land Records, Vol. 1, p 335. Courtesy Clerk of the City of Rutland.

deeds, call themselves gentlemen; yet at his death only thirty acres were improved. His official duties perhaps occupied more of his time than his farming.<sup>6</sup>

. . . The treasurer of the state, on the 12th of February 1779, paid him 24 pounds bounty for killing three wolves; we might infer him to have been something of a nimrod; but this is, at least, partially negated by turning to the inventory of his estate, where we find neither gun, pistol nor sword.

He was such a general business man we should naturally conclude that he must have had library enough to post himself in all political, legal, financial and ecclesiastical affairs; yet we have no evidence that he died possessed of a single volume.

He built his house of plank, when about him the other houses in town were of logs, and added thereto a lean-to, or semi-veranda; yet his residence could scarcely have been palatial, for it was appraised at only 40 pounds, just the appraisal of the sawmill, of which he owned one-quarter, while his barn was valued at 28 pounds.<sup>7</sup>

Bowker died between the 10th of April and the second of September, 1784.<sup>8</sup> There was no burial ground in Rutland then, except the one at Center Rutland, and somewhere in that public acre his remains were buried.<sup>9</sup> The Rev. Jacob Wood, a revivalist, attended his funeral.

If we imagine Bowker standing before us, about five feet and seven inches in height, stoutly built, dressed in his favorite suit of blue . . . silver buttons . . . we shall, perhaps, have the best likeness now attainable of "this fine old New England gentleman, all of the olden school."<sup>10</sup>

*Joseph Bowker*

<sup>6</sup>Hall should know, since he farmed on Blueberry Hill in his later years, but clearing thirty of 100 acres was no mean feat, even if Bowker did own a yoke of oxen, a bay mare, one broad axe, one narrow axe, one sickle, one cart, two iron wedges, two pair plow irons.

<sup>7</sup>Bowker's farm lay south of Killington Avenue, East of South Main Street, north of a line extending easterly and westerly of Lyman Avenue. Its eastern boundary would include Southern Boulevard. Hall refers to the location of the Bowker farmstead twice. In the address of 1863 he locates the dwelling "fronting towards the south, about half way down this noble slope of a pleasant hill" (Gouger Hill). In a paper prepared for Hemenway's Gazetteer, Volume III, p. 1093 he states, "he lived near the present (mid-19th century) residence of Miss Hannah Cole." Further research is required to pin-point the site, but at present we must be content with the knowledge that it lay directly east of the junction of Hopkins Street and South Main Street, and westerly of Avenue A. An idea of the house may be inferred from the description of his widow Sarah's one-third of the dwelling. From an agreement recorded in Volume One, pp. 99 & 100 in the Rutland District Probate Office we find that the widow is granted "one third part of the dwelling House standing on the premises (viz) one room in the southwest corner of said house with the chambers over the same and one bedroom adjoining the west end of the House and also one third part of the kitchen and cellar". . . Bowker had been granted rights in the State-chartered towns of Medway (Mendon), Starksboro, Lincoln, Two Heroes, and Vershire. At his death he had retained title to only the first two rights.

<sup>8</sup>Hall in 1863 was uncertain of the exact date since Bowker's death is not recorded in the vital records of Rutland. Marvel Swan states that July 11 was the day.

<sup>9</sup>A stone erected by the Daughters of the American Revolution in October 1956 serves as a cenotaph. The inscription on the stone (see cut, p 16) is misleading. Bowker's military service was in the French wars; his service in the Revolution was civilian, but highly important, having served on the Committee of Safety, Board of War and the Governor's Council.

<sup>10</sup>This conjectural portrait is drawn by Hall from articles of apparel listed in the inventory of his estate. Bowker's "favorite" suit was his only one. See cover.

## Feed Back

(Comments from our readers)

The Editor:

[the fall issue] . . . has received much favorable comment . . . I've noted one small error. The Grand Theatre [No. 40 in the *Guide to Architecture of the Rutland Communities*] is earlier than 1930. I remember being taken to a show there by the mother of a friend sometime around 1913. I must have been six or seven years old at the time . . .

Arthur Kavanaugh, Southbridge, Mass.

*Joseph Bowker*

To the Editor:

. . . a minor correction—"The Maples" [home of Julia C. R. Dorr, No. 67 in the *Guide*] was built in 1858 . . . this is proved by a study of Julia C. R. Dorr's *Book of Remembrance* and by fact that the three eldest children of Seneca and Julia, including my father, were born in Ghent, N.Y. prior to 1858 . . .

James Bryan Dorr, New Orleans, La.

*Joseph Bowker*

To the Editor:

Just a note to express my enthusiasm and admiration for . . . the *Guide* . . . We in Dorset have a guided tour by cassette . . .

Lucille Fay, Dorset

*Joseph Bowker*

The Editor:

In the issue devoted to Rutland's governors you credit the portrait of Charles K. Williams to the Vermont Historical Society. Were you aware that Mary Greene Nye's *Vermont State House* attributes the portrait to Benjamin Franklin Mason and a reproduction of the portrait appears in Frankenstein and Healey's *Two Journeymen Painters*, also credited to Mason . . .

Robert North, Burlington

[Ed. We blew that one. Though we omitted the name of the artist we did use a photograph of a portion of the portrait from the files of the Vermont Historical Society.

We wish to apologize for the errors in the *Guide*, which are the sole responsibility of the editor and not of the printer who literally "followed the copy out the window."]

Portland July: 1780.

Received of Elias Bowker Sr. a Bundle of Indian  
Corn for the use of the Troop at Portland which  
Corn I sent to Plymouth.

and the said Elias Bowker has not received  
any pay therefor

*Joseph Bowker Comptroller*



## *Acknowledgements*

So little is known of Joseph Bowker that, of necessity, the smallest scraps were clutched at in the hope of casting light on this shadowy figure. The editor soon learned that he was following the very steps that led Henry Hall from rumor to clue to fact.

Most helpful in this research were the *State Papers of Vermont*, published over the years in seventeen definitive volumes. To the devoted editors of these papers, especially Mary Greene Nye, the editor is obligated. The current editor, Ms. Marlene Wallace and her assistant Mr. Robert Hagerman were most kind to allow access to the manuscript papers in the vaults. To the Secretary of State and his predecessor our thanks for reprinting the volumes of the *State Papers* which were out of print and for making available at no cost those volumes which the Society's shelves lacked. Mrs. Marvel Swan, genealogist for the D.A.R., graciously made available material on Bowker which she had accumulated in the course of her work. Thanks also to local historians James S. Davidson and C. A. Pacca and to correspondents far and wide—to Arthur Kavanaugh of Southbridge, Mass. and Gordon Bowker of Sawyerville, Quebec. Appreciation is also acknowledged to the Registers of the Rutland District Probate Court, Mrs. Rita D. Bishop and Miss Tracy Levins; to Mr. John W. Barrett, Clerk of the City of Rutland, and his staff; the library of the Vermont Historical Society and to Mr. Connel Gallagher, archivist in the Special Collections of the University of Vermont.

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